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UNCLAS UNVIE VIENNA 000529

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [AORC](#) [KNNP](#) [IAEA](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: IAEA/SYRIA/BOG TECHNICAL BRIEFING: AGENCY
REAFFIRMS SYRIA SHOULD HAVE DECLARED URANYL NITRATE IMPORT

REF: UNVIE 00521

Summary

11. (SBU) The IAEA Technical Briefing on Syria did not yield many new details beyond those in the Director General's November 16 report. The Secretariat made its pitch for the need to continue the Al Kibar investigation, repeating its outstanding requests for specific Syrian cooperation. DCM asked the only questions of the Secretariat, inquiring after additional details on the safeguards implications of the import of uranyl nitrate and asking where the yellowcake used in experiments at the MNSR was produced. In response, the IAEA confirmed that Syria had a safeguards obligation to report the import of uranyl nitrate. The Secretariat also confirmed that the yellowcake used in the MNSR experiments was produced at the IAEA Technical Cooperation (TC)-subsidized facility at Homs (a pilot plant for producing uranium yellowcake as a by-product of phosphates used in fertilizer production). Notably, Syrian Atomic Energy Director Ibrahim Othman did not speak, although he has commented in each of the previous technical briefings since the Al Kibar reactor issue came to light. (Comment: We presume Othman may not have wanted to dwell on a report that seems to presage a confirmation before the next Board meeting in March of safeguards failures in Syria. Mission will consult like-minded states as to their reactions to the confirmation that the experiments involved yellowcake from a TC-financed facility, and consider whether this fact might be leveraged to pursue transparency and reform in how TC is monitored. End Comment.) End Summary.

"Stuck" on Al Kibar Investigation

12. (SBU) The IAEA technical briefing was given by Section Head for Safeguards Operations B2, Max Aparo. Aparo reviewed the investigation on Al Kibar (or Dair Alzour, as referred to by the IAEA) to date, concluding that the Agency is "stuck." He laid out three main areas in which Syria needs to cooperate: providing necessary access and cooperation to determine origin of the uranium particles, providing necessary information and access to the Agency's investigation of the destroyed facility, and clarifying the procurements that, in the Agency's view, could support construction of a reactor. He cited the latest letter from the Secretariat to Syria dated October 23, 2009 requesting this cooperation and reminding Syria that the Agency sees no limit on access just because this is a military site.

Agency Gets Access to Yellowcake
And Uranyl Nitrate at MNSR

¶3. (SBU) In contrast to the Al Kibar investigation, Aparo noted that Syria has been "very cooperative" on the Agency's efforts to determine the origin of the anthropogenic uranium found at the Miniature Neutron Source Reactor (MNSR) site in Damascus. Aparo said that inspectors visited the MNSR on November 17 and Syria provided access to the yellowcake and to the uranyl nitrate, the materials Syria most recently suggested could be the source of the anthropogenic uranium. Furthermore, Aparo specified that the yellowcake was produced at the Homs plant in Syria. Aparo clarified that uranyl nitrate was both imported and produced from experiments using yellowcake at the MNSR and that the material quantities in question are in grams. In response to our question at the briefing, Aparo clearly stated that the import of the commercially available uranyl nitrate standard should have been declared when imported. However, Aparo did not provide any specifics on the uranyl nitrate procurement.

¶4. (SBU) Aparo said that Syria's explanation that uranium particles came from neutron activation analysis of soil and ore and from a shielded transport container could not be corroborated with additional IAEA samples taken in July 2009 (as noted in the report). He gave an extensive review of the difference between anthropogenic uranium (the type found) and natural uranium to make clear for the mostly nontechnical Member State representatives the notable difference that the former must have been altered via processing.

¶5. (SBU) Aparo showed a list of four publications from the Syrian Atomic Energy Commission that the IAEA had recently asked Syria about, which may be related to the experiments at

the MNSR recently disclosed by Syria. The list was displayed only briefly, but two of the papers were titled: "Preparation of in-house neutron detectors and the software needed to process experimental data, April 2007," and "Measure of the fast neutron flux in the MNSR, 2007."

¶6. (SBU) In response to another U.S. question whether there was any connection between the technical cooperation (TC) project at Homs and the yellowcake used in the newly reported experiments, Aparo confirmed that the yellowcake was produced at Homs. As to whether the experiments utilizing the yellowcake should have been reported for safeguards purposes, Aparo said that the Agency is still analyzing the issue. He added that after the TC-supported project to extract uranium from phosphates concluded the development of a pilot plant at Homs, was found not to be commercially feasible.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Despite a report that introduced significant new information, member state reaction to the Syria briefing was anti-climatic, with only the U.S. asking questions. Even close likeminded do not seem to understand the full implications of the MNSR findings, or are unwilling to confront them. The MNSR findings will need to await further clarification from the Secretariat, to include sampling results, which we expect would be reflected in the March Board report. Meanwhile, as noted above, Mission will consult like-minded states on the implications of the Homs findings for transparency practices in the Technical Cooperation program. We would also encourage further diplomatic efforts in capitals to stimulate attention to the increased prospect for confirmed safeguards failures arising from the IAEA's ongoing Syria investigation. End Comment.
DAVIES